INTERVIEW WITH MR. WILBUR BERGSTROM

June 15, 1977

Conducted by:

Dr. James L. Dodson

--and--

Miss Paula Boyer

INTERVIEW WITH MR. WILBUR BERGSTROM
(hereafter referred to as W.B.)
6/15/77

Dodson: You are about to listen to an interview with Mr. Wilbur Bergstrom. The interview was conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson and Miss Paula Boyer. The date is June 15th 1977. The interview will begin with a statement read by Mr. Bergstrom and which he had written before the interview began.

W. B.: This is life in Van Nuys as I remember it. My name is Wilbur R. Bergstrom and I'm 90 years old. I have been in the Valley for 64 years. The Valley was started by... in 1911 by the developers Mr. Whitsett, Mr. Whitley, Mr. Lakershim and Mr. Van Nuys. It was practically a desert of sand. The street railway was built from Los Angeles,and this brought out the supplies. The Hammond Lumber Company was established soon,and homes started to to be built. It took a lot of lawns and trees and orchards to cut down those vicious sandstorms that we had which penetrated our homes. Tumbleweeds stacked as high as the roof, and from the north side they also had to endure the floods that came down from the north mountains. We had rivers down Van Nuys Boulevard and the east side, Tyrone Avenue,was referred to as our Tyrone River. Sand-bags were a common sight in Van Nuys Boulevard, and bridges were put up over Tyrone whenever it rained heavily. I lost my three year old daughter when she took a wash-tub and tried to use it as a boat in the ...[?] flood. The dams and flood channels have since taken been care of, but we had doubts when homes and shopping centers were built in the washes we knew so well. A large building was errected where the Chevrolet Agency now stands. A small organ factory was induced to come to Van Nuys and make up their head quarters here in 1912. The building

was donated. That was a great boost to Van Nuys,and soon hundrets of employees moved here, including me. Before long Model T Cars were here,and Mr. Huffaker was the dealer.He located in the south-east corner of Sylvan and Van Nuys Boulevard. Marc Sutton had a drug store,, and Mr. Norval and Mr. Langum had a furniture store which also was a mortuary and post office. Dr. Canby, our only doctor who came to house and only charged one dollar. He would walk to make his household calls,and delivered all the babies at home. California Bank was opposite the drug store,and next to it one grocery store run by four Boulanger Brothers. They solicited by horse and wagon in delivering. A feed store was down the block run by Mr. Fraser [?]. He moved out some feed sacks and borrowed some chairs so we could have our first meeting of the Christian Church. Mr. and Mrs. Dan Gibson were our leaders. I believe there were about ten more charter members. Later we moved to a large building. My wife Mabel and I and a baby daughter moved to Van Nuys in 1913. We came out from Los Angeles riding on the back of a hard tired Packard truck owned by organ factory. We purchased a lot 50 x 150 for $485 on Delano Street, than B Street. It is now the location at the entrance to the underground parking of the new Federal Building. We had to carry our water from the front of the lot from a faucet installed there. I put up a small house on red wood foundation called mud sill on the rear of the lot. In those days everybody helped each other,and I had a half a dozen fellows from the factory including the superintendent helping me. Plumbing was not available; So we made the best of it with outside plumbing. Also electricity did not come until later so we had to use kerosine lamps which had to be cleaned daily. Our first washing machine

was run by a waterpower through the hose. The first electric washing machine rocked back and forth and was called blue bird. For years and years we never locked our doors and our first police force were one policeman who rode a bicycle. Three or four blocks from Van Nuys Boulevard was out in the country. The Southern Pacific Train ran through as it does now, and the streets were named by letters starting at a, b, and c and so forth. Chandler Boulevard where the street car tracks were was our only outlet from the Valley. Palm trees lined all the way from Lankershim the street including Roses. As soon as they were made part of the Los Angeles Magnolia, Victory , Vanowen and Sherman Way were put through. Out first school was a grammar school on Sylmar and Gilmore. Then the high school was built, the junior high was a part of it. When my family became so large I had to... The first ready cut house prefab to be put up. Building on it... building it on the front of the lot. The house which I had built and added to was home to many renters including a daughter who had been born there, and her family and a son and his wife. Progress made us move several years after the County House, the County Court House built next door. As soon as I came to Van Nuys I took charge of the machine shop in the organ factory, and it was the happiest time of my life. I held this position for sixteen years until taking talking pictures became, and a demand for the theatre organ stopped. The factory was forced to close. The great depression hit us at the same time, but I managed to keep busy by refinishing pianos, painting cars, and repairing broken houshold articles for families, which I even do now at ninety-one years of age. I find it a great pleasure to work creatively with my hands, and I'm glad I had all the experience with tools to give up me the skills. I have been able to be useful to others in my retirement. During the First World War

we were paied in script.And that was the shortage of... That was the shortage of articles and groceries, but we always had a vegetable garden and many fruit trees, and rabbits and chickens and eggs. The 1918 flue epedemy hit us very hard. Just about everyone in town was sick. It was very hard on our only doctor, and even he came to call weeks later to check and see how we were. We lost our two month old baby who turned black as spinal menengitis, and I had to get out of the sick bed to drive her by to Hollywood Cemetery, because nobody would do it. We have had many little earthquakes. Shakes we call them, but have accepted them,and have been grateful there has not been more damage. I believe the greatest changes came about with the annexion of Los Angeles. Our principals and teachers were inspirations to our children. Our children walked to school and participated in sports. They loved to camp and take our model T car to Big Bear sometimes having to get out and push it up the hill. When I was the California personent on the channel seven recently, I was asked when I would prefer to live, at the present time or in the olden days, and I said, " The good old days". When I was working in, for the Allis Chalmers Company in Milwaukee and then they moved to Los Angeles my step mother had a store there, and she said, one day she said," Let's go to California!" So she just sold the store right away, and out went in 1910 and came to L.A. then. And that is... My daughter was born on north Broadway, and the fellow worked, boarding at this house...[?] the child was born by midwife."Why", he suggested,"come on out to Citrus Street and see, maybe you can get a job in the organ factory." And so we went out there and they hired me right away, and I only worked two months. Then the developers of the Valley decided that they would get the organ factory out here. So they built the big building, you know, and that's how we

moved out here. They've been there eversince. I worked there sixteen years in the Valley then.

Dodson: How many men did the organ factory employe ?

W.B.: Well, I would say, about 150, but so many have died. All the dead men, the superintendents, the managers, Mr. Pratt Mr. Pratt, the superintendent, Mr. Williams [?], another superintendent ...[?] - Mr. Pratt died. And the girls...There must have been at least 50 girls working there, just to taking care of the wiring departments, you know. I had the machine shop, and I had about twenty employees myself. Machinest, you know.

Dodson: Did you happen to know Mr. Carlsted who also worked there, we've interviewed him.

W.B.: We came out here. He worked in the factory on Citrus Street. We came out together 1913. So we've been pals eversince. He comes here regularly every other day or so. I talk to him. In fact he was up there in at the school.

Dodson: Yes, yes, I saw him. Yes, we have been out ot see him.

W.B.: Oh!

Dodson: And we did have an interview. You did not go to school in the Valley then? You finished your school...

W.B.: Oh, no! I was 28 years old then. I had my school in Neenah, Wisconsin.

Dodson: And we were impressed with what you said. You lost two daughters in the Valley when you came out? Is that right? One died...

W.B.: Just one daughter.

Dodson: One daughter, you said died in the flood?

W.B.: Well, she was trying to get into a tub and got her feet wet, and I just caught her in time. I had a house on the river. I ran up quick and then caught her, before she got into the tub. Otherwise she would have floated down Tyrone in the raging flood. Nobody could walk through that.

It was so deep and the waves were foot high. She had gone to the ocean if we had not caught her. So that was a - sadest thing.

Dodson: And then you lost a daughter at the time of the flu epidemic. Is that right? Did your daughter have spinal menengitis.

W.B.: Yes, we had my wife's brother there, visiting us, and I caught the flu first. And long before the two daughters caught it, my wife caught it. My wife caught it too, and they had two... I would not call them nurses, but they did not know anything at all. The wife was nursing the baby and they took and put the baby to the wife to nurse it, and of course she had double pneumonia and the flu at the same time. And two days later, the baby caught it, and she was gone in a minute. She turned black and the doctor said, "Now you get rid of her in a hurry", because they would not touch it at all. And I had to take her to the cemetery, and they took care of them there on.
But we had two people in Van Nuys, they run the bakery there, Mr. and Mrs. Hunt and they turned pitch-black.

Dodson: Is that right?

W.B.: What they called the black plague years and years ago. That's what it was.

Dodson: Did many people die here in Van Nuys?

W.B.: Oh, yes! They died like flies. Yes.

Dodson: Is that right?

W.B.: Oh, yeah! And the doctor had to take care of all those. One doctor! He didn't, he didn't even have a car. He walked.

Dodson: Dr. Candy.

W.B.: Dr. Candy - I met his son up there.

Dodson: Yes!

W.B.: And we talked to him. I talked to him. So...

Dodson: How did the depression affect your family. You said the organ factory closed.

W.B.: Yes! I took the examination for the city, for the machinist,city,Los Angeles. I took the examination and it come out number one. And my... Another fellow took it and he got number two,and he was supposed to go into Van Nuys and work in the shop in Van Nuys,and I was supposed to go way out south. So I got in touch with him and we traded it. That's how I happened to stay here and he went way out there where he wanted to be.

Dodson: But you did not have the problems in the depression then that many people did, because you did have a job.

W.B.: Yes, I worked there for two years. No! Yeah! But in the meantime I repaired chairs and broken lockers and everything I could think of ... I kept busy all the time. Then I... Then the factory closed. They had the big building in there all vacant with the machines and everything else. So I ... One fellow wanted me to repair his car, and so I painted them and did what I could to match up the fenders and so forth. And then Mr. ...[?] was selling pianos at that time. And he brought them down to the factory,and I took all the paint off and refinished them for him. And finally the came around, inspectors came around and said I did not have enough ventilation in the bottom of the place where I was spraying, you know? So I had quickly to give up that. But otherwise I was [?] always busy, I never was lost a day.

Dodson: You were very fortunate.

W.B.: Yeah! Very fortunate.

Dodson: So you didn't have a lot of trouble.

W.B.: Yeah, a lot of them around that WP or what they called them.

Dodson: WPA around that. You know, all they do is go down to the wash and with the shovel in their hand. That's all they had to do.

Dodson: Well, the...[?]had to get some money in their pockets fast and they did not have time enough to figure out real jobs for many of them I guess.

W.B.: That's right. But of course, when we did work why they'd pay in script as I said.

That's a piece of paper, that's as good as money. I don't remember how it looked but I know I had a lot of it.

Dodson: What did you do during the First World War? Were you here at that time?

W.B.: Oh yes, I was.

Oh, during the Second World War after the factory closed, I worked down in, on Citrus Street in Los Angeles. And they were making chimes ...[?]...hanging up there.

So I run their machine shop for sixteen years. The same as I did in the organ factory. And I had a full five men working for me. But they made chimes there, four in a roll, eight in a roll and finally got up to twenty-one in a roll, twenty-five in a roll and thirty-two in a roll. They sold then to all the theaters and, and private homes as same as far away as Hawai. We were busy there. Then the World War came on, and they wanted to make fittings for the army. So we bought a lot of extrusions or long pieces of aluminium. it had all shapes. And I had a man cut them up for me. And then I had arranged a whole row of machines there and built... In two weeks I built all jigs and stuff necessary to put, to fabricate them into elbows and Ts and crosses and everything else, and turned them out, and I had quite a few men working at a time. And I had men and women working as inspectors and all of. It got along pretty good until the war ended and of course that was the end of that. We did not have to make it anymore. Then I went to work over to an engeneering company for the machine there. But... and then that was before the war started. Yes, that's right. I was working there and you were supposed to be frozen the job. You stay right were you are. You can not move at all, but Saturday before it was to be frozen Mr. Mass [?] came over. And he wanted me to come over there to make those fittings. See? So I just got in time there, but the people that said they were very sorry to see me go, because they said every time you wanna come back, you can

come back any time you want, you know. I was ready to be a head inspector. And then Mr. Mass [?] came over and ...[?] over to his place, and made those tools and everything else all by myself. They didn't have nothing there. So -that was a happy job. I enjoyed that very much. Always have enjoyed it. Wherever I could take'em and train a lot of machinists, you know, and stuff. ...[?] There were very few around here that knew anyabout machine-work, you know, but I had worked since I was sixteen years old at the machinist business. That's been that's 45 or 48 years old, I've been in the business. And that has helped me work the wood-work that I do now. It helps an awful lot, because the same tools that you probably use in machine work, you use in the wood-working. You use a few of them up there. See that candelabra? I made worlds and worlds of those. Then I have one that's a ... it's a square that makes, holds eight candles. And I make them in all sizes. So I've got now at the present time I have a catalog that holds 49 different articles that I make. In the ... This lady next door here, she has , what you call a rosemaling. Do you know what a rosemaling is? Well, she takes these articles that I make, and they paint them all different colors ...[?] on the boards and stuff. ...[?] they would paint that all over butthere twere different articles designs and colors and so forth. And she has kept me busy ever since. ...[?] Lumber was awfully high. Take ten boards, ten foot long - you'd pay a hundred dollars for it. ...[?]

Boyer : What about before? How much did it cost?

W.B. : Well, the price was practically doubled in the last two years. You'd take walnut for instance. Used to sell for two dollars and a half per foot. Now it's five dollars per foot.

Boyer: What was it to buy when you first came in the Valley.... [?]

W.B. : The Hammond Lumber Compay. That was very reasonable, 'cause I bought all my lumber to build my houses up there. Very reasonalbe, yeah! Oh, one instance, maybe it sounds funny, but

Mr. Johnson... The factory closed several times and had different people come in and buy it, and then Mr. Johnson was selling pianos and he took over the shop just about when, when the factory started there. Mr. Carlson and I came out there and had a foreman there, a Swedish foreman, running a machineshop just for a few weeks. Well, he got an argument with Mr. Johnson, and... And Mr. Johnson didn't like it. He kicked the fellow ...[?] of the neck, and just pushed him out of the door and turned around and said,"Now, Mr. Berg you take charge." That's how I got the foreman, but then he said... I started to build a house on the rear of the lot, and he came over to visit me one day and he says, "Well, you got all your setting up now, what you're gonna do now?" "Well", I said, "I'm looking for some wallboard". He said,"I just got the thing for you", he said. "I know a Mr. Schuhmacher [?]. Way down here I heard about him making wallboard. He started, just starting up, you know?" So he took me down there, and, cause he was a... Well, I called him... He was talkative, you know. He'd know... shooting a lot of stuff that he shouldn't do, and he says," Mr. Schuhmacher, I'd like to be your agent out in the Valley for your wallboard."He'd no intention of doing that. So they loaded this wallboard on a truck and hauled it way out from South L.A. up to here, and put it on my lawn, and it did not cost me a dime. He says, "Ah, forget about it. That was a ... That was a test of the lumber they brought out, I mean wallboard that they brought out, and he never paied them for it at all ...[?] He was good to me.

Dodson: Were you working in the organ factory during the First World War?

W. B. : ... don't know. Was in 1918, wasn't it ?

Dodson: Yeah !

W. B.: Oh, I must have been, because I came here 1913.

Dodson: And you went right into the organ factory at the time.

W. B. : Yes, oh yes, yes, yeah, yeah. We didn't lose, we didn't lose any thing at all in the First World War. We kept busy all the time, making organs and stuff, you know. But I..I was just two weeks

two weeks too old to get into the draft.

Dodson: Is that right ?

W. B. : And when the war closed... By the second induction ...[?] So I didn't get a chance to get into the army at all. We're lucky that way.

Dodson: Yes, I imagine you didn't grieve over the fact that you didn't get signed up.

W. B. : No, no. I don't like war anyway. No.

Dodson: You remember what sort of scarcities there were during the Second World War ?

W. B. : Oh, sugar was one thing, and dairy products were awfully scarce at that time.

Dodson: Meat was rationed, wasn't it?

W. B. : Huh?

Dodson: Was meat rationed ? I don't remember.

W. B. : No, meat wasn't rationed at all, but sugar was rationed, and...

Dodson: Gasoline was ...[?]

W. B. : Can't quite remember that. I don't remember...[?] What I know is, we had to scrimp pretty badly. You script didn't take care of!!! It'd take care of what you had to pay and what you had to buy.

Dodson: I think the thing that bothered me the most was the lack of chocolate bars, because I like candy.

W. B. : Oh, so do I.

Dodson: I couldn't get those anymore.

W. B. : I usually keep... I usually keep a bunch of it under here all the time. But my youngest daughter, she's against it, and she says, "No sweets for you", but my sister-in-law, my boy's wife, she just sneeked in, and put them under the table and covered them up.

Dodson: You cheat a little bit, do you?

W. B. : Oh, yes, yes, yes, I love that! I love chocolate. That... [?] But the daughter was afraid something could happen, you know? ...[?] got three watch dogs. The older daughter... The younger daughter comes every Monday and Friday. The daughter-in-law

comes Tuesdays and Thursdays, and my oldest daughter, she comes Saturday and Sunday. So all I have is Wednesday for myself. I have to make...[?] All the... The daughter in law, she makes enough on Tuesday to last over Wednesday, so I have no trouble with the cooking. I have three different cooks, so... And they all have...

Dodson: ...[?] gives you variety in your food.

W. B. : They do have a variety. My daughter is a vegetable one. I get primarily vegetables, but the daughter- in-law, she loves to make the enchiladas and all that stuff, you know, Mexican food and stuff like that, which the younger daughter don't like, but the older daughter, she's busy with her work,and so she buys most of the stuff at the store.

Dodson: Which one was it that I met at the organ recital.

W. B. : That was the daughter-in-law, my son's wife.

Dodson: Oh, I see.

W. B. : Yeah. She's a go-getter, a wonderful person.

Dodson: Was any of your property ever damaged by the floods that they used to have in Van Nuys.

W. B. : No we were the one block away from it. It did come down Delano Street, but it hit Tyrone so bad, but... No we have not, not a water... No water got on to the lot at all, because it... Although it skipped into the deep there but the curb held it away. No. It did... The earthquake cracked our house, little house ...[?] and cracked this house here too. There's a big crack in the bedroom there.

Dodson: Was this the Sylmar Quake of '71.

W. B. : Yeah, that's the Sylmar Quake, yeah. And the Long Beach Quake too, you know. That... That hit us pretty hard.

Dodson: Was any damage done to your house by that one ?

W. B. : No, no, no. No I didn't have any. At least I have not seen any.

Dodson: Apparently that was felt pretty strongly, because I know that the high school building had to be condemned after that and the elementary school building.

W. B. : Yes, mhm.

Dodson: Sometimes private houses come through those things better than larger buildings.

W. B. : Yes. Well, this house is two thickness of wallboard which is a perfect insulation and fireproof, and if that had been wood, it probably would have hurt, you know, but it didn't at all, because that wallboard acts as a ... Well, it's flexible, so it didn't hurt at all. I was glad I was here, buy the Monroe and Delano Street there... ah...

End of tape side 1

Dodson: I was asking you whether you lived in this house at the time of the... [?]

W. B. : We moved in 1957.

Dodson: ' 57

W. B. : So, we're up on Delano Street.

Dodson: How old is this house that we are in now ?

W. B. : About 20, 22, 23 years old.

Dodson: So it went through the Sylmar Quake all right, but it wasn't built at the time of the Long Beach Quake.

W. B. : Oh yes, yes, oh yes it was.

Dodson: See, the Long Beach Quake was '33.

W. B. : '33,... '33, ...'57 mhm I don't know.

Dodson: Have the- these earth quakes made you nervous about earthquakes?

W. B. : No.

Dodson: Do you worry about them at all ?

W. B. : No, in fact it... One of the earthquakes nearly knocked me out of bed, but I enjoyed it. To tell the truth I enjoyed it, because it rocked me this way and this way. The bed kept going like this and then it would go this way all the time, but it was different, you know, east and west, and the chimes, whenever

the shock hit, those chimes would go back and forth and rattle to beat the bands, you know. And they made a lot of noise, so I know that this, this earthquake would go in this way sometimes, and then it would go this way, because I could just see the bed coming up this way, but I, I, I... I enjoyed it. To tell you the truth about it, I wasn't scared a bit.

Dodson: Is that right ?

W. B. : I tried to get up and come out of this room, then I thought better of it, so I/we got back in bed again. I know I could not make it.

Dodson: Did you have dogs at that time ?

W. B. : No.

Dodson: I was going to ask you what effect this had on you. From what I've read some of the animals here in the Valley were very much affected and terrified by....[?]

W. B. : Yeah, yeah, yeah. No I didn't. We didn't have it at all. I had in fact in the east, back east, I mean back east in Illinois, Wisconsin I had that, and I've trained those dogs. Go and take... get them a strip of paper in their mouth and tell them to go to the butcher's shop and get the meat. And he would not bring the meat home and would make a different route. He wouldn't go down the main street. He would take the alleys and stuff and stuff and go back there and so that the other dogs wouldn't get him, but he never, never touched that meat at all. Never hardly made a mark in it. I tell him to go get my slippers, and he'd go get them slippers. I tell him to go get the paper in the morning he'd get the paper. I trained him pretty good.

Dodson: Yeah, you certainly did.

W. B. : Spaniel, ...[?] Very good.

Doson: What special changes in the Valley did you notice since you've been living here that have especially impressed you. What do you think the most important changes have been ?

W. B. : Well, hardly, as far as the duststorms are concerned by the building of the... The growing of the trees and the lawns and everything else stopped the dust to come in our house. That

was the most, the best one of them all. Because our kitchen would be one eighth inch of sand whenever ...[?] get big duststorm.

Dodson: Is that right? Those duststorms were a real problem.

W. B. : Oh, they were a problem. That's sure. That's sure.

Paula : Did that stop as soon as the buildings ...[?]

W. B. : Yes, as soon as enough houses got up, you know, because they are all built close to the Valley here,close to the Boulevard where we were living, you know, but...[?] as I said before, you go two blocks out and you were in the country. There is nothing out there at all, but just, just sand ....[?] That's what I liked best about it.

Karen: Did you ever ride on a red car ?

W. B. : Not very much. No, I never did ride. My daughters did because they went to a school, a trade school, in L.A. and they took it every day. ....[?] I had my car.

Paula : Did it take very long for them to get from here to L.A. on the red car ?

W. B. : It took about good, good half an hour. Yeah, they ...[?] pretty fast.

Dodson: Do you have anything else Paula?

Paula: ....[?]

Dodson: How about the situation on crime? Do you feel that it was much safer in the Valley when you first came here than it is now ?

W. B. : ...[?] said in the article here that we never locked our doors.

Dodson: I noticed that.

W. B. : Yeah. We never looked our doors or we'd go away for weeks at a time and never locked the doors..

Dodson: Is that so ?

W. B. : That's right.

Dodson: And never had anything bother you.

W. B. : Never had anything.

Dodson: You feel life's been a deterioration then. Things have gotten now worse that they were.

W. B. : Oh they are off and on. The other day , right? A load of Mexicans got all around the street over here and start slashing the tires and they cut up a half a dozen cars and slashed them. Even though the tires was of steel belt in'em, they slashed those right straight through. They must have used a saw or something. A neighbor got 'em. Ruined two good cars, and one car especially. They put a hammer and opened up the lid and smashed all the spark plugs, and ruined the engine of 1230 dollars, something like that damage to the car inside. Got inside and tore up the upholstery no end.

Dodson: That's hard to understand. You can understand somebody stealing something...

W. B. : Yes.

Dodson: ... because at least he's trying to get something good out of it, but just destroying something is ...

W. B. : Yes.

Dodson: ... hard to say.

W. B. : I don't know. They were Mexicans as I saw them, you know.

Dodson: ....[?]

Paula : ....[?]

W. B. : Yeah.

Dodson: What do you think about changes in fashions ? You like women's fashions now better than when you first came into the Valley or the other way around ?

W. B. : Well, sometimes, and sometimes no. I don't like those real short dresses that they have on. ....[?] I don't like it at all. But my... When... At the time we...Everybody had long dresses on. In fact they swept the streets up, got them clean.

Dodson: Do you mind if we close the door. I think we're getting the sound of the mower out there.

W. B. : Yeah we get those things from other ....[?] Many cars coming up, up, up.

Dodson: The mower was recording tremendously on here.

W. B. : Oh, yeah!

Dodson: If not other things. Well, I think the latest style is more jeans and slacks than dresses.

W. B. : Yes, I like that part of it. I think that . You name it. I don't know what you call it.

Dodson: Of course, you haven't seen much change in men's clothes. Have you over the years ?

W. B. : No, there was a time when they had the zoot.

Dodson: That's right, the zoot suit. I...

W. B. : Oh, Lordy, those Mexicans down there, but Lord here, they all came out in zoot suits, and they weren't... and they were... They were the worst ones of all.

Dodson: Of course there were only a small number of men who wore those. The average man never wore them.

W. B. : Nothing but Mexicans, and I only wonder why the zoot suits. Long coats, way down, way down, way down below their thighs, and they were mostly the ones that could steal and all ....[?] It seems they had to do that when they were... put on those suits they had to do something dirty, you know, mean, honery. But there was a law to get rid of them in a hurry.

Dodson: Was there a bad feeling there in the Valley between the service men and the zoot suiters ? I think there were some troubles in Los Angeles itself. Were there ?

W. B. : Oh yeah, oh yeah, yes, yes. As I say, they figured that they had to do something, out... against the law, you know.

Paula: When you first went out here, what did you do for entertainement or to socialize people ? Did people do very much at all?

W. B. : Well, we would have the moving... ah, the movies, but no, I don't know. I don't know of any entertainement we had. Oh, yeah, yeah, thats what, what we... We would go out every Saturday. We're go either to Big Bear or Little Bear or to Laguna Beach, and eat on the sand, you know, or go up to Big Bear, but the roads were terrible ...[?] go back and forth. When you'd come to the curb, there'd be that much sand, you know, and you'd had to get out and push it up around the corner.

Dodson: I can imagine a trip up to Big Bear at that time would have been quite a trip.

W. B. : It is. ...[?] three hours to get up there from here.

Dodson: ...[?] road, I imagine...[?]

W. B. : Well, you had what they call a control. You'd get there 2 o'clock in the morning and you'd be up there just about or you get up there at... You leave here midnight and get up there at 2 o'clock when the control started. The people would come down and you had to wait until they'd all come down. Then you, then you could go up, but no, no two on the road at one time.

Dodson: So it was a one way road always.

W. B. : One way road, yeah. That's what they called controlled, yeah.

Dodson: Was that Mt. Lowe Cable Car in use when you where here, the car that went up Mt. Lowe?

W. B. : Oh! ...[?]

Dodson: That was one of the early attractions, I think,...

W.B. : I imagine it was, yeah.

Dodson: ...track up there. You never went up there then, I think.

W. B.: No, I never went up there , no. I did walk up Mt. Wilson. Walked up Mt. Wilson. We crawled on our hands and knees half the time.

Dodson: Well, they've got a road ther now, but it's still a little bit of an adventure to drive over that Mt. Wilson Road.

W. B. : Yeah, I heard that, yeah. It's... I heard that, yeah.

Dodson: [To Paula] We probably should have our outline to follow.

I noticed there is some agitation now for the Valley to secede from Los Angeles. How do you feel about that ?

W. B. : We talked about that. I hope they don't. I hope they don't.

Dodson. You'd rather that they stayed as part of the city.

W. B. : I'd rather stay. I'd rather stay like we are at all.

Dodson: Now, you've had children. How would you feel about the bussing situation if you had small children at the present time?

W. B. : Well, I think a lot, but... nobody, nobody else...[?] Rather go to the school nearest to you, rather then they bussed away across the Valley. If there were schools nearest you that you

could go to or walk to. The part I don't believe in that bussing at all.

Dodson: Well, I think that's been the way most people have thought.

W. B. : Yes, it is. Yeah.

Dodson: ...[?] They weren't very much in favor.

W. B. : Why, why do you have to be bussed across the fifteen minutes or twenty minutes ride when you can go to school right near your place here.

Dodson: Have there been any minority troubles in the Valley that you know with the Mexicans or blacks or any other group?

W. B. : Not the blacks. Never had no trouble with the blacks at all. There's, there's very few here. Isn't very many here. Was a time when... Oh, years and years before a black man came in here. They wouldn't let, wouldn't sell them property at all.

Dodson: Is that right?

W. B. : Yeah, wouldn't sell'em property. But they're moving in gradually. The Mexicans are coming in down bolow here now. They'll move right up here.

Dodson: Of course, the earlyest settlers in the Valley were the Mexicans and Spanish around the San Fernando Mission.

W. B. : Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dodson: Did the people of Van Nuys get along pretty well with them?

W. B. : Oh yes, oh yes. They have a mission up above here... up here, San Fernando Mission.

Dodson: Yes, I knew about that.

W. B. : ...[?] went through that several times already. We used to go up and take our lunch up there and eat in the park, and they're very, very nice people. I, I liked them very much.

Paula: You came into the Valley 1912, right?

W. B. : 1913.

Paula: 1913. Was that the same year they brought the water in?

W. B. : Well, so they had no water, except the pipe to front of your lot. That's all.

Paula: Do you remember when, when... Were you out there when they brought

the aqueduct in?

W. B. : Oh yes, yes, oh yes. We were up there when they were just started with the first water came through. We, we knew it's coming through there, and it came through the spillway and then it... They placed a lot of rocks and stuff in the place of it,and, you know, built cement so that it would jump up and aerate it. That's the purpose of it. Yeah. Now we went up there to first, the very first beginning.

Dodson: You remember just what took place, what sort of a program they had?

W. B. : No, I don't. I don't. I don't know that. I don't.

Dodson: I think Mr. Mulholland himself was there.

W. B. : Oh yeah.

Dodson: Did you ever meet him or see him?

W. B. : No, ... [?] A wonderful person.

Dodson: One of my former students was writing about early Jewish settlers in the Valley. Do you know of any early Jewish settlers or people who were Jewish ?

W. B. : Oh sure. Mr. Greenberg ...[?]
He established the first Bijou, ...[?] call it, theatre, and then the... First he had a bowling alley there. When he came here he had a bowling alley. We used to bowl all the time in his place, then he had discarted that and started a Bijou, ...[?] call it, and then he'd quit the one on further out of Van Nuys, the Van Nuys Theatre. He built that. He had a blacksmith shop down just back of the organ factory that used to be there and... I used to go down there quite often and I liked them very much. ...[?] all the time with them, and he liked to have me come down and said," You, you come down Mr. Bergstrom. Come down. Let me talk to you. We talk some more." He was a Jewish man.

Dodson: Were there any other Jewish merchants during that early ...[?]

W. B. : He's the only one that I knew about. The only one I knew about, maybe the first one I knew.

Dodson: Somebody told me there was a grocery store operated by somebody

named Berman, do you remember that?

W. B. : Someone was telling me that up, up at the school. But I don't remember that at all. I don't know where it was... I haven't the slightest idea where it was.

Dodson: Was there any anti-jewish feeling in the Valley that you knew of?

W. B. : No. Have had a lot of them here. I had a Jewish mailman [?] first. And ... uh...had a Jewish man that painted our house...separate house here...this house here.

Dodson: I know there isn't now but I just wondered whether in the very early days...

W. B. : No. No. He was the only one that I know about. Never... never heard of anybody else at all.

Boyer: In the very early days was there ever any Klu Klux Klan? Problems?

W. B. : No. No. Never got in Van Nuys. Uh, uh. No.

Dodson: So there really was no sort of tensions here between the various groups?

W. B. : No. No. No tensions. No. See you could walk downtown and we used to go down every Saturday night and men everywhere...and one of our entertainments was to watch the traffic and watch the people come by and so forth...that was our main...one of the things we liked about...you know... Then you'd meet everybody. If you wanted to meet somebody you'd go downtown and they, they'll be there walking up and down...everywhere..what I liked the best...my aunt and uncle used to sit, get a seat up on one...the little seats up there and sit and watch til nine, ten o'clock at night; just for entertainment.

Dodson: Well, of course that's one thing that's all gone now.

W. B. : Oh yeah. Oh, yeah. You don't meet anybody like that any more. No, all the people I know are all gone. Old Mr. Carlson's the last one I know about...and Mr....the fellow.[?].in the organ factory he is living and uh..and one of the...one of the men that made the large pipe for

the organ...he died the other day...he was one of the last ones...

Dodson: What is the name of the man that ran the glue factory...or the glue room?

W. B. : Kollet. Pete Kollet. He did glueing of all the pipes, wood pipes.

Dodson: How did he spell his last name?

W. B. : K O L L E T.

Dodson: And he still lives here in the valley?

W. B. : Oh yes, he lives up here near Mission Acres someplace.

Dodson: I see. We might try to get a hold of him.

W. B. : Nice...he's a nice man to meet.

Dodson: Do you remember his first name?

W. B. : Pete.

Dodson: Pete.

W. B. : I have his address and phone number and...everything...

Dodson: Fine...

Boyer: How do you spell his last name again...

W. B. : K O double L E T. He was here about two weeks ago when I seen him...he comes over every once in a while...we talk a little bit. "Well," he says, "I'll be back again ... we'll talk some more, or else I'll call you...[?]...

Dodson: Do you think there's much difference in the tone of organs? Could you tell that was a Morton organ the other night when we went to the uh high school?

W. B. : I like the original ones I don't care much for these uh..

Dodson: Electronic...?

W. B. : Electonic...too mechanical...you don't get the...the notes are not the same...

Dodson: It wouldn't be the same fullness of the notes?

W.B. Oh no. No, no...more of a ...a...it's hard to describe it. They...they produce good music. I wouldn't say that they don't, but, they produce good music. But it's not soothing

enough until you, until you get one of those big wood pipes or the metal pipes and all..

Dodson: Have you ever been up to San Sylmar and heard the organs they have up there? They have a museum in Sylmar; it's called San Sylmar, the museum. They have quite a selection of pianos and organs but they have adapted them to play mechanically from tapes but they were not originally intended to play that way and they have one very large pipe organ up there. I just wondered if you had been up there and seen it..

W. B.: Well, it's probably one they took out of a theatre here or something like that.

Dodson: I think a number of those theatre organs have been bought by individuals.

W. B.: Oh, they're all...they're all purchased...yes...they're all purchased..Mr. ...[?]had onein his house, one of the developers and he had it piped all the way around the room, it'd come out of benches; he had benches in the front room all around and...[?]..come up all over the room...

Dodson: Do you play the organ yourself?

W. B. No. I'm just a machinist. Uh...woodworker...
Now these uh...organs started out with tubes; they were all tubes first you know, just like a bulb you might say. Now they're transistors, all transistors, that's a piece of metal...that's where they get them...the transistors that came out first...the uh... crystal set?

Dodson: Yeah.

W.B.: Well they made the first crystal set here in Van Nuys here and managed to get a hold of...someone gave me this stone and it had a little transistor, that little wire that fits and we had to hunt all over to find that place where there'd be a sound...we'd take it to bed with us and put our ear phones on and probablyto sleep with it and with the earphones still on your head. All you could hear was a woman's voice

way in the distance some place, singing, you know. But we put the earphones in a bowl and that, that uh, what do you call it?

Dodson: Would amplify it?

W. B.: Amplify it. Yeah, amplify the sound. Big bowl.

Dodson: That was ingenious. I never would have thought of doing it.

W. B.: Well, that's what I did. ...[?]...wired my own coils and everything...made all my own coils. That's the first and second, first uh...first town, second town. Secondary coil, but the..secondary coil...

Dodson: I wish we had one of those old crystal sets for our museum.

W.B.: Yeah. Yeah.

Dodson: Do you know Mr. Whitsett yourself?

W.B.: No I haven't met him because I bought my car from...I was instrumental in buy...well, he...bought my first car, a ford. I met him first in his little real estate office he had up there right at the corner, where the shoemaker place is now, and got talking to him about a car and whether he couldn't talk to Mr. ...[?]...across the street would ...[?] get a second hand car for me. So I bought a second hand one. A 1918 car and I bought it in 19.., 1819, uh..1919. Well,...

Dodson: What make of a car was it?

W.B.: Huh?

Dodson: What make was it?

W.B.: Ford. Model T. Yeah,...I had to take that thing all apart. I was the first one to uh,..uh, how to describe it now... yeah, something went wrong with the magnets inside there. You took a leather belt, you couldn't get in there with your hands, but, you took a leather belt and shoved it throught there and to get,..knock off whatever would fall out, you know. I remember I started that...[?[...that

damn thing, you know.

Dodson: Did you know any of the other early developers of Van Nuys? Come in contact with them?

W.B.: No. Well, Mr. Sutton. He was a, well, he uh, he was part, but not exactly a real estate man. He was a drug store man. But he, well, no I never met him...Lankershim, no, I never did ..[?]...

Dodson: Do you know of any old historic buildings or sites in the Valley that are still here? We're trying to find out about old houses that might still be around.

W.B.: I don't know whether Hoffaker's house is still living still up there. I believe it is though. No, not..yeah, Hoffaker.

Paula: Where would that be?

W.B.: Huh?

Paula: Where would that be?

W.B.: It's on uh...I think it's on Haynes or one of those streets up there. The large three, two or three story house. It's on the north side of the building, the north side of the street. That's the only one I know about that's still standing.

Paula: Is it near..what cross street is it, South VanNuys or..?

W.B.: Well, it's about a...it's about three blocks from Van Nuys Boulevard..about in there. A big frame house, you can't miss it. Well, most of that whole section's been torn down. My little...my little house in the corner would be one of the first ten that the bulldozer..[?]..a while ago, you know. They bulldozed by big one too. I had a big rumpus room there.

Paula: Yeah?

W.B.: Oh, larger than this front room here, all finished in knotted pine. A great big one, a monstrous fireplace

there. And I had on it...my wife's father was a lumberman out in New Mexico and he cut down several trees of pure pitch, uh what they call uh...anyway, it's only one tree in a thousand he said that would uh..deteriorate like that, turn to pitch and he sent me one of those boards, two boards, two of those boards down here for me to use along with, with some pine boards. I put down on the front lot, put them down by..[?] And, you know, I used that for years and years and years. I kept using a little bit to make this and that, you know. And I had a big board on top of the fireplace there, it was that thick, over two inches thick and it was good, good, well over twelve inches wide in the fire place. And the fire had no effect on that pitch at all, cause it's such a hard pitch.

Dodson: Is that right?

W.B.: Yeah. I can't think of the name of it now. But,..and I still have some of it left out there yet. I made all kinds of stuff out of that. You don't see that any more. Trees are all gone now out in New Mexico.

Dodson: Do you know of other long time residents in the valley that we might interview, that could tell us about some of the early days? Do you have any names you could suggest to us?

W.B.: Uh..Mrs. ..Uh...[?].....her husband died here last year. He was a.. he had charge of erecting the organs down there and he passed away here about a year ago. She lived at an address down here..she lives in an apartment now. She knows all about Van Nuys ....[?]...she's a very interesting person, she could tell you a lot of things. Then there's Mrs. Sartwel.

Dodson: How would you spell her name?

W.B.: S A R T W E L

Dodson: Do you know her first name? Can we find her in the telephone directory?

W.B.: Oh yeah, she's the only Sartwel in the book. Lydia. Lydia Sartwell. She lives over on Community, Community

Street, back of, let's see..I don't know just exactly where it is..away from uh..uh..Vanowen, the other side of Vanowen.

Paula: But it's in Van Nuys, right?

W.B.: Definitely, it's in Van Nuys, yeah. I have her address and everything. ...[?]..there used to be a chicken ranch upup in there.

Dodson: There were quite a few chicken ranches in the valley at the time?

W.B.: Oh yeah.

Dodson: I imagine that would have been the case for..[?].. wouldn't it? Certainly would have been a lot of those ranches.

W.B.: Oh yeah, started after I was here though. There was nothing like that here at all.

Dodson: When you first came in what was the situation? What sort of farming were they doing?

W.B.: Agriculture. Raising, raising uhm..uh..well vegetables and stuff like that...no grains, just vegetables.

Dodson: Do you remember where our college is now situated at Fulton and...